

GOD'S WILL ABOUT THE FUTURE

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A SERMON
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“Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”
James 4:13-17

[“It is remarkable that the sermon selected for this week should be so peculiarly suitable for the present trying time. It ought to be read with special solemnity. Oh, that it may be the means of leading many to make the great preparation for the future which only believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have made!”]

MEN today are just the same as when these words were first written. We still find people saying what they are going to do today, tomorrow, or in six months' time, at the end of another year, and perhaps still farther. I have no doubt there are persons here who have their own career mapped out before them pretty distinctly, and they feel well-nigh certain that they will realize it all. We are like the men of the past, but this Book, though it has been written so long, might have been written yesterday, so exactly does it describe human nature as it is at the end of this nineteenth century.

The text applies with very peculiar force when our friends and fellow workers are passing away from us. Sickness and death have been busy in our midst. Perhaps in our abundant service we have been reckoning what this brother would do this week, and what that sister would be doing next week, and so on. Even for God's work we have had our plans, dependent in great measure on the presence of some beloved helpers. They have appeared among us in such buoyant health that we have scarcely thought it possible that they would be struck down all in a moment. Yet so it has often been.

The uncertainty of life comes home to us when such things occur, and we begin to wonder that we have reckoned anything at all safe, or even probable, in such a shifting, changing world as this. With this in full view, I am going to talk about how we ought to behave with regard to the future, and attempt to draw some lessons for our own correction and instruction from the verses before us.

Following the line of the text, and keeping as close to it as we can, we will notice, first, that *counting on the future is folly*. Then we will observe, what is clear enough to us all, that *ignorance of the future is a matter of fact*. In the third place, I shall set before you the main truth of this passage, that *recognition of God in the future is wisdom*. Our fourth point shall be that *boasting of the future is sin*, and our final thought will be, that the *using of the present is a duty*.

I. To begin with, it will need but few words to convince you that COUNTING ON THE FUTURE IS FOLLY.

The apostle says, “Go to now!” As if he meant, “you are acting absurdly. See how ridiculous your conduct is.” “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will do such and such a thing.” There is almost a touch of sarcasm in the words. The fact of frail, feeble man so proudly ordering his own life and forgetting God, seems to the apostle James so preposterous that he scarcely deems it worthwhile to argue the point, he only says, “Go to now!”

Let us first look at *the form of this folly*, and notice what it was that these people said when they were counting on the future. The text is very full of suggestions upon this matter.

They evidently thought everything was at their own disposal. They said, “We will go, we will continue, we will buy, we will sell, we will get gain.” But is it not foolish for a man to feel that he can do as he likes, and that everything will fall out as he desires, that he can both propose and dispose, and has not to ask God’s consent at all? He makes up his mind, and he determines to do just what his mind suggests. Is it so, O man, that your life is self-governed? Is there not, after all, One greater than yourself? Is there not a higher power that can speed you, or stop you? If you do not know this, you have not yet learned the first letter of the alphabet of wisdom. May God teach you that everything is not at your disposal, but that the Lord reigns, the Lord sits King forever and ever!

Notice that these people, while they thought everything was at their disposal, used everything for worldly objectives. What did they say? Did they determine with each other, “We will today or tomorrow do such and such a thing for the glory of God, and for the extension of His kingdom”? Oh, no, there was not a word about God in it, from beginning to end!

Therein they are only too truly the type of the bulk of men today. They said, “We will buy, then we will carry our goods to another market at a little distance, we will sell at a profit, and so we will get gain.” Their first and their last thoughts were of the earth earthy, and their one idea seemed to be that they might get sufficient to make them feel that they were rich and increased in goods. That was the highest ambition upon their minds.

Are there not many who are living just in that way now? They think that they can map out their own life, and the one objective of their efforts seems to be to buy and sell, and get gain, or else to obtain honor, or to enjoy pleasure. Their heart rises not into the serene air of heaven, they are still groveling here below.

All that these men of old spoke of doing was to be done entirely in their own strength. They said, “We will, we will.” They had no thought of asking the divine blessing, nor of entreating the help of the Most High. They did not care for that, they were self-contained, they called themselves “self-made men,” and they intended to make money. Who cannot make money who has made himself? Who cannot succeed in business who owes his character, and his present standing, entirely to his own exertions, and to his own brain? So they were full of self-confidence, and began reckoning for the future without a shadow of doubt as to their own ability.

Alas, that men should do even so today, that, without seeking counsel of God, they should go forward in proud disdain, or in complete forgetfulness of “the arrow that flieth by day,” and “the pestilence that walketh in darkness,” until they are suddenly overwhelmed in eternal ruin!

It is evident that to those men everything seemed certain. “We will go into such a city.” How did they know that they would ever get there? “We will buy and sell, and get gain.” Did they regulate the markets? Might there be no fall in prices? Oh, no! they looked upon the future as a dead certainty, and upon themselves as people who were sure to win, whatever might become of others.

They also had the foolish idea that they were immortal. If they had been asked whether men might not die, they would have said, “Yes, of course all men must die some time or other,” for all men count all men mortal, but in their hearts they would have made an exception in their own case, if we may judge them by what we were apart from sovereign grace. “All men count all men mortal but themselves.” Without any saving clause, they said, “We will continue there a year.” How did they know that they would see a single quarter of that year through? But you must not press such men too closely with awkward questions. If you had done so, they would have said, “Do not talk about death, it makes one melancholy.”

Having looked at the form of this folly of counting on the future, let us speak a little on *the folly itself*. It is a great folly to build hopes on that which may never come. It is unwise to count your chickens before they are hatched, it is madness to risk everything on the unsubstantial future.

How do we know what will be on the morrow? It has grown into a proverb that we ought to expect the unexpected, for often the very thing happens which we thought would not happen. We are constantly surprised by the events which occur around us. In God's great oratory of providence, there are passages of wondrous eloquence, because of the surprise power that is in them. They come upon us at unawares, and overwhelm us. How can we reckon upon anything in a world like this, where nothing is certain but uncertainty?

Besides, the folly is seen in the fact of the frailty of our lives, and the brevity of them. "What is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time." That cloud upon the mountain—you see it as you rise in the morning, you have scarcely dressed yourself before all trace of it has gone. Here in our streets, the other night, we came to worship through a thick fog, and found it even here in the house of prayer. But while we worshipped, there came a breath of wind, and on our way home a stranger would not have thought that London had been, but a few hours before, so dark with dirty mist, it had all disappeared.

Life is even as a vapor. Sometimes those vapors, especially at the time of sunset, are exceedingly brilliant. They seem to be magnificence itself when the sun paints them with heavenly colors, but in a little while they are all gone, and the whole panorama of the sunset has disappeared. Such is our life. It may sometimes be very bright and glorious, but still it is only like a painted cloud, and very soon the cloud and the color on it are alike gone. We cannot reckon upon the clouds, their laws are so variable, and their conditions so obscure. Such also is our life.

Why, then, is it, that we are always counting upon what we are going to do? How is it that, instead of living in the eternal future, where we might deal with certainties, we continue to live in the more immediate future, where there can be nothing but uncertainties? Why do we choose to build upon clouds, and pile our palaces on vapor, to see them melt away, as aforetime they have often melted, instead of by faith getting where there is no failure, where God is all in all, and His sure promises make the foundations of eternal mansions?

Oh! I would say with my strongest emphasis, Do not reckon upon the future! Young people, I would whisper this in your ears, Do not discount the days to come. Old men, whispering is not enough for you, I would say, with a voice of thunder, Count not on distant years, in the course of nature, your days must be few. Live in the present! Live unto God, trust Him now, and serve Him now, for very soon your life on earth will be over.

We thus see that counting on the future is folly.

II. Secondly, IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE IS A MATTER OF FACT.

Whatever we may say about what we mean to do, we do not know anything about the future. The apostle, by the Spirit, speaks truly when he says, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Whether it will come to us laden with sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, we cannot tell. Tomorrow may mark the end of our life, possibly even the end of the age. Our ignorance of the future is certainly a fact.

Only God knows the future. All things are present to Him, there is no past and no future to His all-seeing eyes. He dwells in the present tense evermore as the great I AM. He knows what will be on the morrow, and He alone knows. The whole course of the universe lies before Him, like an open map. Men do not know what a day may bring forth, but JEHOVAH knows the end from the beginning. There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass—one is that God knows, and the other is that we do not know.

As the knowledge of the future is hidden from us, *we ought not pry into it*. It is perilous, it is wicked, to attempt to lift even a corner of the veil that hides from us things to come. Search into the things that are revealed in Holy Scripture, and know them, as far as you can, but be not so foolish as to think that any man or woman can tell you what is to happen on the morrow, and do not think so much of your own judgment and foresight as to say, "That is clear, I can predict that." Never prophesy until after the event, and then, or course, you cannot prophesy, therefore never attempt to prophesy at all. You know not what

shall be on the morrow, and you ought not to make any unhallowed attempt to obtain the knowledge. Let the doom of King Saul on Mount Gilboa warn you against such a terrible course.

Further, *we are benefited by our ignorance of the future*. It is hidden from us for our good. Suppose a certain man is to be very happy by and by? If he knows it, he will be discontented till the happy hour arrives. Suppose another man is to have great sorrow very soon. It is well that he does not know it, for now he can enjoy the present good. If we could have all our lives written in a book, with everything that was to happen to us recorded therein, and if the hand of Destiny should give us the book, we would be wise not to read it, but to put it by, and say—

*“My God, I would not long to see
My fate with curious eyes,
What gloomy lines are writ for me,
Or what bright lines arise.”*

It is sufficient that our heavenly Father knows, and His knowledge may well content us. Knowledge is not wisdom. His is wisest who does not wish to know what God has not revealed. Here, surely, ignorance is bliss, it would be folly to be wise.

Because we do not know what is to be on the morrow, *we should be greatly humbled by our ignorance*. We think we are so wise, do we not? And we make a calculation that we are sure is correct! We arrange that this is going to be done, and the other thing, but God puts forth His little finger, and removes some friend, or changes some circumstance, and all our propositions fall to the ground. It is better for us, when we are low before the throne of God, than when we stand up and plume ourselves because we think we can say, “Oh, I knew it would be so! See how well I reckoned! With what wondrous forethought I provided for it all!” Had God blown upon our plans, they would have come to nought. We know nothing surely. Let that thought humble us greatly.

Seeing that these things are so, *we should remember the brevity, the frailty, and the end of our life*. We cannot be here long. If we live to the extreme age of men, how short our time is! But the most of us will never reach that period wherein we may say to one another, “My lease has run out.” How frail is our hold on this world! In a moment we are gone, gone like the moth, you put your finger upon it, and it is crushed. Man is not great, man is less than little. He is as nothing, he is but a dream. Ere he can scarcely say that he is here, we are compelled to say that he is gone.

We are glad that we do not know when our friends are to die, and we feel thankful that we cannot foretell when we shall depart out of this life. What good would it do us? Some who are in bondage through fear of death might be in greater bondage still, while those who are now careless about it would probably feel more content in their carelessness. If they had to live another twenty years, they would say, “At any rate, we may sport away nineteen of them.”

As for those of us to whom this world is a wilderness, and who count ourselves as pilgrims hurrying through it, we know enough when we know that this is not our rest, because it is polluted, and that the day will soon come when we shall enter the Canaan of our inheritance, and be “forever with the Lord.” Meanwhile, the presence of the Lord makes a heaven even of the wilderness. Since He is with us, we are content to leave the ordering of our lives to His unerring wisdom. We ought, for every reason, to be thankful that we do not know the future, but at any rate, we can clearly see that to count on it is folly, and that ignorance of it is a matter of fact.

III. Thirdly, RECOGNITION OF GOD WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE IS TRUE WISDOM.

What says our text? “For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” I do not think that we need always, in every letter and in every handbill, put “If the Lord will,” yet I wish that we oftener used those very words. The fashionable way is to put it in Latin, and even then to abbreviate it, and use only the two consonants, “D.V.,” to express it. You know, it is a fine thing when

you can put your religion into Latin, and make it very short. Then nobody knows what you mean by it, or if they do, they can praise your scholarship, and admire your humility.

I do not care about those letters, "D.V." I rather like what Fuller says when he describes himself as writing in his letter such passages as, "God willing," or "God lending me life." He says, "I observe, Lord, that I can scarcely hold my hand from encircling these words in parenthesis, as if they were not essential to the sentence, but may as well be left out as put in. Whereas, indeed, they are not only of the commission at large, but so of the quorum, that without them all the rest is nothing, wherefore, hereafter, I will write these words freely and fairly, without any enclosure about them. Let critics censure it for bad grammar, I am sure it is good divinity." So he quaintly puts the matter.

Still, whether you write, "If the Lord will," or not, always let it be clearly understood, and let it be conspicuous in all your arrangements that you recognize that God is over all, and that you are under His control. When you say, "I will do this or that," always add, in thought, if not in words, "If the Lord will." No harm can come to you if you bow to God's sovereign sway.

We should recognize God in the affairs of the future, because, first, *there is a divine will which governs all things*. I believe that nothing happens apart from divine determination and decree, even the little things of life are not overlooked by the all-seeing eye. "The very hairs of your head are numbered." The station of a rush by the river is as fixed and foreknown as the station of a king, and the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as much as the stars in their courses.

All things are under regulation, and have an appointed place in God's plan, and nothing happens, after all, but what He permits or ordains. Knowing that, we will not always say, "If the Lord will," yet we will always feel it. Whatever our purposes may be, there is a higher power which we must ever acknowledge, and there is an omnipotent purpose, before which we must bow in lowliest reverence, saying, "If the Lord will."

But while many of God's purposes are hidden from us, *there is a revealed will which we must not violate*. It is chiefly in reference to this that the Christian should always say, "I will do this or that, provided that, when the time comes, I shall see it to be consistent with the law of God and with the precepts of the Gospel." I say now, "I will do this or that," but certain other things may occur which will render it improper for me to do so. Hence, to be quite in accordance with the Word I so deeply reverence, I must always put in the saving clause, sometimes giving utterance to it, but in every case meaning, whether I put it into words or not, "I will do so and so, if it be right to do it, I will go, or I will stay, if it is the will of God."

In addition to this, *there is a providential will of God which we should always consult*. With this guidance, which comes from the circumstances that surround us, believers are familiar. Sometimes a thing may seem to us to be right enough morally, and yet we may not quite know whether we should do it or not. Or perhaps there are two courses equally right, when judged by the Word of God, and you are uncertain which to follow. The highest wisdom, in such a case, is to wait for God to make a path plain by some act of providence.

When you come where two roads meet, in your perplexity pull up, kneel down, and lift your hearts to heaven, asking your Father the way. And whenever we are purposing what we should do—and we ought to make some purposes, for God's people are not to be without forethought or prudence—we should always say, or mean without saying, "All my plans must wait till the Lord sets before me an open door. If God permit, I will do this, but if the Lord will, I will stop, and do nothing. My strength shall be to sit still, unless the Master wishes me to go forward."

May I whisper into the ear of some very quick, impetuous, and hasty people, that it would be greatly to their soul's benefit if they knew how to sit still? Many of us seem as if we must always do everything at once, and hence we make no end to muddle for ourselves. There is often a blessed discipline in postponement. It is a grand word, that word "wait," especially in this particular connection. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." Be patient,

sometimes even to be passive in the hand of God will be our strength, and to stand still until the cloudy, fiery pillar moves in front of us, will be our highest wisdom.

There is yet another sense I would give to this expression, *there is a royal will which we would seek to fulfill*. That will is that the Lord's people should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. So, as the servants of the Most High, we go forth to do this or that, "if the Lord will," that is to say, if, by so doing, we can fulfill the great will of God in the salvation of men.

I wish that this was the master motive with all Christians, that we were each willing to say, "I will go and live in such a place if there are souls to be saved there. I will take a house in such a street, if, by living there, I can be of service to my Lord and Master. I will go to China or Africa, or to the ends of the earth, if the Lord will, that is to say, if, by going there, I can be helping to answer that prayer, 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'"

Dear Christian friends, do you put yourselves entirely at God's disposal? Are you really His, or have you kept back a bit of yourself from the surrender? If you have retained any portion for yourself, that little reserve that you have made will be the channel by which your life will bleed away. You say, "We are not our own; we are bought with a price," but do you really mean it?

I am afraid that there is a kind of mortgage on some Christians. They have some part they must give, as they fancy, to their own aggrandizement. They are not all for Christ. May the Lord bring us all to His feet in whole-hearted consecration, till we can say, "We will not go to that city unless we can serve God there. We will not buy, and we will not sell, unless we can glorify God by buying and selling, and we will not wish even for the honest gain that comes of trading, unless we can be promoting the will of God by getting it. Our best profit will consist of doing God's will."

A man can as much serve God by measuring calico, or by weighing groceries, as he can by preaching the Gospel, if he is called to do it, and if he does it in a right spirit. This should always be our aim, and we should put this ever in the forefront of our life. "I go or stay, I ascend or I descend, if the Lord will, the Lord's will shall be done in my mortal body whether I live or whether I die."

May this be your resolve, then, let this clause, "if the LORD will," be written across your life, and let us all set ourselves to the recognition of God in the future. It is a grand thing to be able to say, "Wherever I go, and whatever happens to me, I belong to God, and I can say that God will prepare my way as well when I am old and grey-headed as He did when I was a boy. He shall guide me all the way to my everlasting mansion in glory, He was the guide of my youth, He shall be the guide of my old age. I will leave everything to Him, all the way from earth to heaven, and I will be content to live only a day at a time, and my happy song shall be—

*"So for tomorrow and its need
I do not pray,
But keep me, guide me, hold me, Lord,
Just for today."*

IV. And now, fourthly, BOASTINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE ARE EVIL.

"But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." I will not say much upon this point, but briefly ask you to notice the various ways in which men boast about the future.

One man says, about a certain matter, *"I will do it, I have made up my mind,"* and he thinks, "You cannot turn me. I am a man who, when he has once put his foot down, is not to be shifted from his place." Then he laughs, and prides himself upon the strength of his will, but his boasting is sheer arrogance. Yet he rejoices in it, and the Word of God is true of such a one, "All such rejoicing is evil."

Another man says, *"I shall do it, the thing is certain,"* and when a difficulty is suggested, he answers, "Tut, do not tell me about my proposing and God's disposing, I will propose, and I will also dispose, I do not see any difficulty. I shall carry it out, I tell you. I shall succeed." Then he laughs in his foolish pride, and rejoices in his proud folly.

All such rejoicings are evil. They are foolish, but what is worse, they are wicked. Do I address myself to any who have no notion about heaven or the world to come, but who feel that they are perfect masters of this world, and therefore talk in the manner I have indicated, and rejoice as they think how great they are? To such I would earnestly say, "All such rejoicing is evil."

I heard a third man say, "*I can do it. I feel quite competent.*" To him the message is the same, his boasting is evil. Though he thinks to himself, "Whatever comes in my way, I am always ready for it," he is greatly mistaken, and errs grievously. I have often been in the company of a gentleman of this sort, but only for a very little while, for I have generally got away from him as soon as I could. He knows a thing or two. He has got the great secret that so many are seeking in vain. All of you ordinary people, he just snuffs you out. If you had more sense, and could do as he does—well, then, you could be as well off as he is.

Poor man! "Nobody needs to be poor," says he. "Nobody needs to be poor. I was poor a little while, but I made up my mind that I would not remain poor. I fought my own way, and I could begin again with a crust, and work myself up." You will notice his frequent use of the capital "I," but ah, dear sir, God has thunderbolts for these great I's! They offend Him, they are a smoke in His nostrils. Pride is one of the things which His soul hates. No man should speak in such a strain, "All such rejoicing is evil."

But that young man yonder talks in a different tone. He has been planning what he will do when he succeeds, for of course, he is going to succeed. Well, I hope that he may. He is going to buy, and sell, and get gain, and he says, "*I will do so and so when I am rich.*" He intends then to have his fling, and to enjoy himself, he laughs as he thinks what he will do when his toilsome beginnings are over, and he can have his own way. I would ask him to pause and consider his life in a more serious vein, "All such rejoicing is evil."

There is, of course, a future concerning which you may be certain. There is a future in which you may rejoice. God has prepared for them that serve Him a crown of life, and by humble hope you may wear the crown even now. You may, by the thoughts of such amazing bliss, begin to partake of the joy of heaven, and this will do you no harm. On the contrary, it will set your heart at rest concerning your brief stay on earth, for what will it matter to you whether your life is cloudy or bright, short or long, when eternity is secure? But concerning the uncertainties of this fleeting life, if you begin to rejoice, "All such rejoicing is evil."

V. That brings me to my last and most practical point, which is this, THE USING OF THE PRESENT IS OUR DUTY.

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." I take this text with its context. It means that he who knows what he ought to do, but does not do it *at once*, to him it is sin. The text does not refer to men who live in guilty knowledge of duty, and yet neglect it, its message is to men who know the present duty, and who think that they will do it by and by.

In the first place, *it is sinful to defer obedience to the Gospel*. "He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Do you say, "I am going to repent"? Your duty is to repent now. "I am going to believe," do you say? The command of Christ is, "Believe now." "After I have believed," says one, "I shall wait a long time before I make any profession." Another says, "I am a believer, and I shall be baptized some day." But as baptism is according to the will of the Lord, you have no more right to postpone it than you have to postpone being honest or sober.

All the commands of God to the characters to whom they are given come as a present demand. Obey them now. And if anyone here, knowing that God bids him to believe, refuses to believe, but says that he hopes to trust Christ one of these days, let me read him this, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not"—this word is in the present tense—"to him it is sin."

In the next place, *it is sinful to neglect the common duties of life* under the idea that we shall do something more by and by. You do not obey your parents, young man, and yet you are going to be a minister, are you? A pretty minister will you make! As an apprentice you are very dilatory and neglectful, and your master would be glad to see the back of you, he wishes that he could burn your

indentures, and yet you have an idea you are going to be a missionary, I believe? A pretty missionary you would be!

There is a mother at home, and her children are neglected while she talks to her neighbors, but when her children are off her hands, she is going to be a true mother in Israel, and look after the souls of others. Such conduct is sin. Mind your children, darn the stockings, and attend to your other home duties, and when you have done that, talk about doing something in other places.

If present duties are neglected, you cannot make up for the omission by some future piece of quixotic endeavor to do what you were never called to do. If we could all be quiet enough to hear that clock tick, we should hear it say, "Now! Now! Now! Now!" The clock therein resembles the call of God in the daily duties of the hour. "To him that knoweth to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin," even though he may dream of how he will, in years to come, make up for his present neglect.

Then, dear friends, *it is sinful to postpone purposes of service*. If you have some grand project and holy purpose, I would ask you not to delay it. My dear friend, Mr. William Olney, whose absence we all mourn tonight (This sermon was preached at the time that Mr. William Olney, the senior deacon of the Tabernacle church, was lying unconscious, after a paralytic stroke. He fell asleep in Jesus the next morning. On the following Lord's-day evening, the Pastor preached from Acts 13:36, the sermon that will be published next week, "*If the LORD Will*"), was a very prompt, energetic man. He was here, he was there, he was everywhere, serving his Lord and Master, and now that he is suddenly stricken down, his life cannot be said to be in any sense unfinished, there is nothing to be done in his business, there is nothing to be done in his relation to this church. There is nothing left undone with regard to anybody. It is all as finished as if he had known that he was going to be struck down. And I believe that that is the way we all ought to live

Mr. Whitefield said that he would not go to bed unless he had put even his gloves in their right place. If he should die in the night, he would not like to have anybody asking, "Where did he leave his gloves?" That is the way for a Christian man to always live, to have everything in order, even to a pair of gloves. Finish up your work every night, nay, finish up every minute.

I have seen Mr. Wesley's journal, though it is not exactly a "journal," it does not give an account of what he did in a day, nor even what he did in an hour. He divided his time into portions of twenty minutes each, and I have seen the book in which there is the record of something done for his Lord and Master every twenty minutes of the day. So exactly did he live, that no single half-minute ever seemed to be wasted. I wish that we all lived in that way, so that we looked, not at projects in some distant future that never will be realized, but at something to be done now.

Last Thursday, when I was speaking, I said that some Christian people had never told the story of the cross to others, and urged them to begin to do so at once. A young friend, sitting in this place, leaned over the front of the pew, and touched a friend sitting there, saying to her, "I would like to speak to you about that." He had never spoken to her before, he did not even know her, and he thus addressed her while the service was proceeding.

A member of the church, sitting by her side, who heard what the young man said, was so pleased with his prompt action, that she stayed after the service to sympathize and help, while he explained the way of salvation. The young person to whom he spoke, came to tell me, last Tuesday, that she had found the Savior through that well-timed effort.

Dear friends, that is the way to serve the Lord. If we were to do things at the moment when they occurred to us, we should do them to purpose. But oh, how many pretty things you have always meant to do, and have never even attempted! You have strangled the infant projects that have been born in your mind, you have not suffered them to live, and grow into manhood of real action. First thoughts are best in the service of God, and the carrying of them out would secure great benefit to others and much fruit for ourselves. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

God help us, if we are saved, to get at this holy business of serving the Lord Christ, which as far exceeds buying, and selling, and getting gain, as the heavens are higher than the earth. Let us do

something for Christ at once. You young people that are newly converted, if you do not very soon begin to work for Christ, you will grow to be idle Christians, scarcely Christians at all, but I believe that to attempt something suited to your ability almost immediately, as God shall direct you, will put you on the line of a useful career. God will bless you, and enable you to do more as the years roll onwards.

I have this last word, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin," that is, *it is sinful in proportion to our knowledge*. If there is any brother here, into whose mind God has put something fresh, something good, I pray him to translate it into action at once. "Oh, but nobody has done it before!" Somebody must be first, and why should not you be the first if you are sure that it is a good thing, and has come into your heart through God the Holy Ghost? But if you know to do good, and do not do it, it will be sin every minute that you leave it undone. Therefore get at it at once.

And you, my sister, who tonight, while sitting here, have been thinking of something you might have done which you have not yet attempted, attempt it at once. Do not let another sun rise, if you can help it, before you have begun the joyful and blessed service. "The time is short." Our opportunities are passing, "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away." Be up and doing. Soon we shall be gone. May we never hear the summons to go home while there is anything left undone that we ought to have done for our Lord and Master!

I am conscious of having spoken but very feebly and imperfectly, but you know, my heart is heavy because of this sore trial which has come upon us through the stroke that has fallen upon our beloved deacon, William Olney, and when the heart is so sad, the brain cannot be very lively. May God bless this word, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JAMES 4

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—90, 39, 211

When last week's sermon was sent to the printers. Mr. Spurgeon was unable to write a letter to go at the end of it, for he was suffering so severely that he could not even dictate a message to his sermon readers. It was not then anticipated that his illness would take the terrible form it afterwards assumed, but on *Tuesday, January 26*, when the doctor came, he was obliged to report his patient's condition as "serious."

Since then, the daily bulletins have carried the sad tidings far and wide, and most of the readers of the sermons probably know, by this time, that their beloved preacher has been suffering from the same malady that so grievously afflicted him during last summer and autumn. His illness, on this occasion, has not developed exactly the same symptoms as before, but at the date of writing this note (January 31), the doctor reports that, "*his condition gives cause for the greatest anxiety.*"

It is with profound regret that the Publishers record the death of the beloved Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He was called to his rest, at Mentone, on Sunday, January 31st, at 11 p.m.

To all who were privileged to know Mr. Spurgeon, this event has come as a great sorrow, a sorrow which will certainly be shared by every reader of the weekly sermons.

*"I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me,
Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth:
Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."
Revelation 14:13.*

The weekly Sermon and *The Sword and the Trowel* will be continued as usual, the Publishers having a large quantity of manuscripts and Sermons hitherto unpublished.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.